

WOODROW WILSON, "THE PUEBLO SPEECH"
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Abstract: Woodrow Wilson's Western tour was one of the most ambitious and controversial speaking tours in the history of American politics: a grueling 8,000-mile, twenty-two-day tour on behalf of the Versailles treaty and the League of Nations. This analysis shows how, over the course of the tour, Wilson abandoned his neo-classical principles of oratorical statesmanship and increasingly resorted to the demagogic techniques of the modern, "rhetorical presidency," most notably in his last speech in Pueblo, Colorado.

Key Words: Woodrow Wilson, League of Nations, Western Tour, Pueblo speech, rhetoric, demagoguery.

"The flags are out, the bunting is flying, the hotels are jammed, the streets are crowded, the people are chattering, the big search lights have been tested, the acoustics have been arranged—for it is President's day in Reno." Thus did the *Nevada State Journal* report as Reno prepared for the arrival of President Wilson on September 22, 1919. Everywhere he stopped on his twenty-two day, 8,000-mile trip in support of the League of Nations he met with similar receptions. At some venues the crowds rivaled those that had cheered Wilson during his triumphal parades through European capitals after the war. At the same time, however, many voiced skepticism, even passionate hostility toward Wilson's crusade. The *Nevada State Journal* was honored by the president's visit, but it also dubbed his Western tour a propaganda campaign and criticized Wilson himself as "a poor prophet and a man of extremely bad judgment."¹

Historians have had similarly mixed opinions about Wilson's Western tour. For his admirers, as John Milton Cooper Jr. has noted, the Western tour was Wilson's "finest hour," a "noble act of self-sacrifice" for an equally noble cause. In their view, Wilson "willingly, knowingly risked his health, indeed his life" to promote what he genuinely believed was the only sure way to lasting peace. In short, the Western tour "represented the purest and best in Woodrow Wilson." To his detractors, on the other hand, Wilson's decision to take his case to the people was a "willful, ill-conceived act of vanity and desperation." Driven by "self-righteous egotism, bordering on a messiah complex," Wilson embarked upon the "swing around the circle" in a fit of anger, then took such a rigid stance against any changes to the treaty that "he fell prey to delusions

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of grandeur about his own persuasive powers and even to a wish for martyrdom in a holy cause."² In the end, according to these historians, Wilson got just what he deserved: trying to bully senators into ratifying the treaty without reservations, he instead suffered a humiliating defeat when the U.S. Senate killed the treaty altogether.

Given the outcome, historians generally agree with Thomas Bailey that Wilson's Western tour proved a "disastrous blunder."³ Yet most still celebrate the final speech of the tour, in Pueblo, Colorado, as the "high point" of the trip and a "fitting climax" to a "world-shaking speaking career—perhaps the most memorable in history."⁴ What is it about the Pueblo speech that has inspired historians to praise it and rhetorical scholars to rank it among the "top 100 speeches" of the twentieth century?⁵ Why, out of all of Wilson's speeches, is the Pueblo address among the most famous? The answer, it seems, lies not so much in the speech itself as in later events. Part of the answer also may lie in our changing conceptions of "eloquence" and in our conviction that, in the end, Wilson proved "right" about the League of Nations.

Wilson's Western tour came at a transitional moment in the history of American public address. During the Progressive Era, Americans celebrated a neo-classical ideal of reasoned and disinterested oratorical statesmanship. Nostalgically recalling the Golden Age of American Oratory, they fondly recalled the great orators of the antebellum era, longing for a return of "great debates" to the American political landscape. After the war, however, this neo-classical ideal began to give way to a new, more cynical attitude toward mass persuasion and democratic deliberation. Impressed by the wartime successes of the Committee on Public Information, students of American politics increasingly viewed the public as easily duped and manipulated. The age of "scientific" propaganda had arrived.

Perhaps more than any other figure of his era, Woodrow Wilson embodied this tension between the old and the new attitude toward public persuasion. Early in his Western tour, he typically delivered elaborate, well-reasoned speeches in support of the treaty, articulating the principles underlying the agreement and engaging his audience in what he called "common counsel." Later, however, he assumed the attitude of the propagandist, demonizing his opponents and waving the bloody shirt of war sentimentality. Toward the end of the tour he even began to question the motives and the patriotism of his critics, and when that didn't work he tried to scare the public into supporting his uncompromising position with talk of another, even more devastating war. By the end of the tour, Wilson was simply refusing to discuss the substantive issues surrounding the treaty, declaring the debate over. He even threatened to kill the treaty himself if the Senate did not capitulate to his demand for ratification without any sort of conditions or reservations.

Wilson's drift toward demagoguery culminated in the Pueblo speech. Betraying the neo-classical principles he had articulated as a scholar, Wilson struck a defiant pose in Pueblo, claiming a public mandate and simply refusing to debate the question of reservations. By the time he reached Pueblo, Wilson was no longer interested in finding common ground or proposing some compromise. Instead, he proclaimed it time for a "showdown" and tried to bully his critics. In doing so, he not only betrayed his own

principles of oratorical statesmanship, but foreshadowed some of the worst tendencies of the modern, "rhetorical" presidency.

Wilson's Biography

Thomas Woodrow Wilson was born in Staunton, Virginia, on December 28, 1856. His father, Joseph Ruggles Wilson, was a prominent Presbyterian minister who, in 1858, moved his family to Augusta, Georgia, where he served as pastor of the First Presbyterian Church during the Civil War. After the war, Joseph Wilson accepted a position teaching "sacred oratory" at the Columbia Theological seminary in South Carolina. Nostalgic for "the bygone era when oratory had a more central place in American society," the elder Wilson "never tired of telling how he had seen the great Webster speak in person, or of bemoaning the fallen state of contemporary public discourse."⁶ Convinced that all young men aspiring to leadership should train in oratory and debate, the Reverend Wilson encouraged his son to cultivate his speaking skills. During adolescence the younger Wilson could be found reciting great speeches in his father's empty church.

In 1873, the younger Wilson, still known as "Tommy" to his friends and family, entered Davidson College in North Carolina, where he excelled as a student of English, rhetoric, and the ancient languages. At Davidson, he also was elected to the Eumenean Society, a college debating club, and he began his serious study of rhetoric and the great British orators. In the summer of 1874, Wilson left Davidson to join his family in Wilmington, North Carolina, where his father had accepted a new pastoral appointment. During his final two years at Davidson, according to scholar Robert Kraig, Wilson developed his life's ambition: to "make himself into an oratorical statesman of the first rank—an American Gladstone."⁷

From 1875 to 1879, Wilson attended the College of New Jersey (after 1896, Princeton University), where he further immersed himself in the study of rhetoric and politics. As a student at Princeton, Wilson became a campus leader and, "within decorous limits, a bit of a radical."⁸ Complaining that "very little attention" was paid to oratory at Princeton, Wilson editorialized in *The Princetonian* about the need for a "systematic course of instruction" in the "Ciceronian art."⁹ Lacking such instruction, Wilson schooled himself, reading Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and the speeches of Edmund Burke, John C. Calhoun, and Daniel Webster, among others. He also joined the American Whig Society, one of two literary and debating societies at Princeton. Later he helped found the Liberal Debating Club, which was modeled on the British parliamentary system.

Wilson wrote and published prolifically while a student at Princeton. In his final year, he published a prize-winning essay on William Earl Chatham, "the first of the parliamentary orators."¹⁰ The same year he published an essay often cited as the fullest expression of his early political thought: "Cabinet Government in the United States." In that essay, Wilson proclaimed "debate . . . the essential function of a popular representative body," and he complained about the lack of "real deliberation" in the U.S. Congress. Arguing that the "very life of free, popular institutions" depended on

their "breathing the bracing air of thorough, exhaustive, and open discussions," he advocated a British-style cabinet government as the only way to attract "men of real ability" to government service and assure "open and free debate." Imagining a more "responsible government" led by true "orator-statesmen," Wilson wrote:

The cardinal feature of Cabinet government . . . is responsible leadership,—the leadership and authority of a small body of men who have won the foremost places in their party . . . by evidence of high ability upon the floor of Congress in the stormy play of debate. None by the ablest can become leaders and masters in this keen tournament in which the arguments are the weapons, and the people the judges. . . . To keep men of the strongest mental and moral fibre in Congress would become a party necessity. Party triumph would then be a matter of might in debate, not of supremacy in subterfuge.¹¹

Not only did Wilson have faith in the power of debate to clarify issues and reveal the truth, but he trusted ordinary citizens to judge wisely.

After graduating from Princeton, Wilson studied law at the University of Virginia for a year, then dropped out to complete his legal studies on his own. After a disappointing year practicing law in Atlanta, he undertook doctoral studies in politics at Johns Hopkins University. Wilson's doctoral dissertation, "Congressional Government: A Study in Politics," was published in 1885 and immediately established his scholarly reputation. Echoing many of his earlier orations and essays, *Congressional Government* reflected on the lack of real debate in Congress and emphasized the need for a new generation of orator-statesmen with intellect, moral character, and an "instinct and capacity for leadership." *Congressional Government* did not directly advocate reform, but it again lamented the lack of great orators in Congress and the failure of that body "to embody the wisdom and will of its constituents."¹²

After three years on the faculty at Bryn Mawr and two more at Wesleyan University, Wilson returned to Princeton in 1890 as a professor of Jurisprudence and Political Economy. At Princeton, his academic reputation soared, as he became one of the most popular lecturers on campus and published prolifically. Between 1893 and 1902, Wilson published nine books and thirty-five articles, including a popular history of the *Civil War, Division and Reunion*, and a five-volume *History of the American People*. As a professor at Princeton, Wilson also fought for curriculum reforms and earned a national reputation lecturing off campus.

In 1902, the trustees at Princeton elected Wilson the thirteenth president of the college. During his eight years as Princeton's president, Wilson continued to promote curriculum reform and established a "preceptorial," or British-style tutorial system. Toward the end of his presidency, however, he became embroiled in two reform battles with the Old Guard at Princeton. In the first, Wilson sought to replace Princeton's traditional "eating clubs" with a system of "quadrangles" that he believed would eliminate "rivalries and cliques" and create a sense of community, bringing "all four of the classes" together in "a sort of family life."¹³ In the second, he battled with the graduate dean, Andrew West, over whether a new graduate school should be located

on campus or "in lordly isolation away from the undergraduates."¹⁴ In the end, Wilson lost both battles, but his reform efforts attracted national attention and established his reputation as a crusader for democracy.

In the fall of 1910, the Democratic political bosses of New Jersey tapped Wilson as their candidate for governor, confident that they could control and manipulate such a political novice. Wilson resigned his post at Princeton and accepted the nomination, then campaigned against the very bossism that had won him the nomination. Attracting support from progressives in both political parties, Wilson easily won the election and, as Governor, he continued to attack special interests and promote progressive reform. In June of 1912, the Democratic Party, badly divided between conservatives and progressives, met in Baltimore to select its presidential nominee. After forty-six ballots, they picked a relatively unknown candidate: the New Jersey governor with but two years of political experience, Thomas Woodrow Wilson.

As Cooper has noted, the presidential campaign of 1912 was "one of the great campaigns in American history"—a campaign that "crackled with excitement" yet also aired "questions that verged on political philosophy."¹⁵ Building on his reputation as a democratic crusader, Wilson defended government "by the people" against the alleged "paternalism" of Theodore Roosevelt, who had bolted the GOP to run under the progressive, "Bull Moose" banner. Meanwhile, the Republicans re-nominated William Howard Taft, who lacked both Roosevelt's ability to dramatize issues and Wilson's intellectual gifts. Wilson may have lacked Roosevelt's "animal heat" and his "capacity for arousing mass affection,"¹⁶ but with the Republican vote split Wilson won what was, up to that time, the largest electoral majority in U.S. history.

As President, Wilson had remarkable success promoting his New Freedom reforms, including banking legislation, tariff reform, and new regulations on trade, monopolies, and agricultural production. Combining appeals to public opinion with direct leadership of Congress, he broke tradition by delivering some twenty-seven addresses to Congress, making such speeches "a major weapon in his oratorical arsenal." In the spirit of "common counsel," Wilson limited most of his congressional speeches to basic principles, leaving "leeway for the adjustments and compromises" that became "the hallmark" of his leadership.¹⁷ The result, as Cooper has written, was a "spectacular, possibly unmatched, record of legislative and party leadership." As Cooper concludes, only FDR's New Deal and Lyndon Johnson's Great Society "rival Wilson's accomplishments with the New Freedom between 1913 and 1916."¹⁸

Wilson had a tougher time winning support for his foreign and military policies. After calling upon Americans to embrace "the true spirit of neutrality," he soon found it impossible to remain neutral himself. The sinking of the *Lusitania* in May of 1915, the "rape of Belgium," and other German atrocities convinced Wilson that only Germany's defeat could save the United States itself from attack. Arguing first for "preparedness," Wilson took his case to the people in January and February of 1916, staking out a middle ground between "the pacifists on one side and the militarists on the other."¹⁹ As president, he pledged, he would protect both the peace and the honor of the nation. Reelected in 1916 on the slogan, "He kept us out of war," Wilson tried one last time to avoid direct American intervention by mediating a peace settlement. Appearing before

Congress on January 22, 1917, Wilson spelled out the terms for a "peace without victory"—the only sort of settlement, he argued, that could produce lasting peace.²⁰ The plan attracted little enthusiasm from the belligerents, and in February Germany resumed unrestricted submarine warfare, sinking eight American ships over the next two months. When Wilson again appeared before Congress, on April 2, 1917, he thus had a very different purpose: to request a declaration of war against Germany. Accusing that nation of casting aside "all restraints of law and humanity" and warring against "mankind" itself, Wilson committed the United States not only to ending the war but ridding the world of the "menace" of "autocratic governments." The world, he declared, "must be made safe for democracy."²¹

Less than a year later, Wilson appeared again before Congress to announce another plan for peace, the so-called "Fourteen Points." Combining specific proposals for resolving territorial disputes with idealistic principles of international conduct, Wilson called for open diplomacy, freedom of the seas, free trade, and arms reductions. The highlight of Wilson's plan, however, was an idea that would become his consuming passion in the closing years of his life: a "general association of nations . . . for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike."²² This "association," of course, would evolve into the proposed League of Nations, an idea that many saw as a repudiation of America's isolationist tradition. In Wilson's view, however, such an association had become not only a practical but a moral necessity. It offered the only hope for peace in the modern world, in his opinion—the only way to make the world "safe for democracy."

Germany's drive to win the war before America could mobilize its forces almost succeeded. By the fall of 1918, however, some 1,750,000 American troops had arrived on the Western front, and the tide of the war began to turn. Following a string of military victories, Allied forces finally captured the Hindenburg Line, Germany's supposedly impregnable barrier of heavily defended trenches. As their military defeats accumulated, the Germans hastily installed a parliamentary government, and in October 1918 the new German government agreed to consider a peace settlement based on Wilson's Fourteen Points. After a month of negotiations, the Kaiser fled to Holland and the armistice was signed. World War I officially ended on November 11, 1918.

Less than a month later, on December 4, Woodrow Wilson set sail as the head of a large delegation to the Paris peace conference. Wilson faced sharp criticism at home for his personal diplomacy and for the make-up of his delegation, which included but one Republican. In Europe, however, he received tumultuous welcomes, with huge throngs cheering him in France, England, and Italy. At the talks themselves, he met stiff Allied opposition to his "Fourteen Points," and he ultimately compromised away much of his program for peace. On the proposed League of Nations, however, he remained firm, and the conference rewarded his persistence by making the League Covenant an integral part of the Versailles treaty.

Even as he conceded that the treaty as a whole was far from ideal, Wilson left Paris triumphant. Whatever imperfections remained in the treaty itself, he reasoned, could be worked out under the auspices of the new League of Nations. Back home,

however, Wilson's congressional opponents objected not only to the terms of the peace settlement but also to the League Covenant. Concerned that the League might compromise U.S. sovereignty and constrain America's freedom of action, more than a third of the senators and senators-elect signed a Round Robin letter announcing that they would oppose the treaty without changes. Furious with the letter and its chief sponsor, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, Wilson lashed back with accusations that the sponsors of the Round Robin were deliberately trying to "embarrass the administration of the Government."²³ Compounding his difficulties, Wilson delivered a "dud" of a speech to the Senate on July 10, 1918. Botching the delivery and failing to address the concerns of those senators opposed to the treaty, he played right into the hands of those bent on amending or even killing the treaty altogether.²⁴

Subsequently, Wilson met with Lodge's Foreign Relations Committee and announced that he had no objection to what he called "interpretive" reservations. Nevertheless, public opinion appeared to be turning against the League, so in August, 1919, Wilson played his trump card: he announced that he would take his case to the people in a "swing around the circle." It was, as historian Arthur S. Link has observed, "one of the most fateful decisions of his career"²⁵—a decision that would not only decide the outcome of the treaty debate but shape Wilson's legacy for decades to come.

Planning for Wilson's "swing around the circle" actually began before he returned from Paris. Rumors of the tour appeared in the newspapers as early as February, and by the end of June the president's personal secretary, Joseph Tumulty, had drafted tentative plans for the tour. After deciding to go ahead with the tour in August, Tumulty finalized the plans: the president would tour the Midwest and the Far West, covering more than ten thousand miles in twenty-seven days and delivering some forty major speeches. He would start in Columbus, Ohio on September 4, and the tour would end with a speech in Louisville on September 29. Carefully planning the details of the president's visit to each city, Tumulty designed the tour to maximize media coverage and to rally public opinion behind the League. In retrospect, it proved to be one of the first tours of the modern, "rhetorical" presidency: a tour designed to go "over the heads" of Congress by appealing directly to "the people."

Wilson's Rhetorical Philosophy

As Dayton David McKean noted in *A History and Criticism of American Public Address*, Woodrow Wilson "never published any systematic statement of his views on the art of public speaking." But as a young scholar of oratory and politics, he celebrated a neo-classical rhetorical tradition that emphasized reasoned argument, civility and decorum, and a commitment to the public good. Like the ancient rhetoricians, Wilson drew a clear ethical distinction between the responsible orator—Quintillian's "good man skilled in speaking"—and the sophist or the demagogue. In Wilson's view, the true "orator-statesman" could be distinguished from the "artful dialectician" by his "high and noble thoughts," his refusal to compromise his core principles and convictions, and his emotional self-restraint.²⁶ Proclaiming the orator who maintained "complete sovereignty over his emotions . . . a thousandfold more powerful and impressive than he

who 'saws the air' and 'tears a passion to tatters,'" Wilson summarized his oratorical ideals in a speech on John Bright that he delivered while a student at Virginia. Praising Bright for never allowing his "passions" to "master him," Wilson located his "marvelous powers of public speech" not in physical or emotional display, but in high principles and noble ideas:

No orator ever more signally illustrated that eloquence is not of the lips alone. Eloquence is never begotten by empty pates. Groveling minds are never winged with high and noble thoughts. Eloquence consists not in sonorous sound or brilliant phrases. Thought is the fibre, thought is the pith of eloquence. Eloquence lies in the thought, not in the throat. . . . It is persuasion inspired by conviction.²⁷

Wilson's distaste for passionate display reflected his faith in public opinion. In response to fears that democratic deliberation might be dominated by demagogues, Wilson argued that "sophistry" could never walk "openly in the cloak of wisdom and truth unchallenged and undiscovered," and he viewed public exposure as an effective check on demagoguery. As Wilson explained in an unpublished essay also written while he was at Virginia: "Subtle word-play, dialectic dexterity, rhetorical adroitness, passionate declamation cannot shield [the sophist] from the searching scrutiny to which his principles and his plans will be subjected at every turn A charlatan cannot long play the statesman successfully while the whole country is looking critically on." Few persons had any "just conception" of the "informing and unmasking disclosures of thorough debate," he concluded, and he disagreed with those who argued that the masses could not be "brought to exercise intelligent discretion." From that opinion "I utterly dissent," he declared; "I believe . . . the people's choices will be deliberate and wise."²⁸

Wilson viewed public opinion not only as an effective check on demagoguery, but also as a moderating force. "In a free government founded on public opinion," he wrote, the "great principles" of governance had to be "worked out cautiously, step by step." Public opinion "must not be outstripped" but "kept pace with."²⁹ Wilson admired strong leaders, but he insisted that leaders should never lead too far in advance of public opinion. In his most mature scholarly work, *Constitutional Government in the United States* (1908), he imagined an active, "rhetorical" president who might educate and lead public opinion while remaining true to the "real sentiment and purpose of the country." If the president "rightly" interpreted the "national thought" and "boldly" insisted upon it, Wilson concluded, he would be politically "irresistible."³⁰ But if he led too far in advance of public opinion, he would lose his moral and political authority.

As Daniel Stid has argued, there is "little doubt" that Wilson was thinking about Theodore Roosevelt when he wrote *Constitutional Government*.³¹ In Roosevelt, he found a leader who satisfied the public's "instinct" for "unified action"³²—that craving for inspired leadership that had gone unsatisfied in a government dominated by Congress. Yet he also considered TR too "brash and strident"—too much the spellbinder, too prone to vituperative harangues—to be considered a true orator-

statesman.³³ TR lacked the discernment and prudence—that is, he lacked the character— of Wilson's ideal statesman. Similarly, Wilson criticized such popular "spellbinders" as William Jennings Bryan and Robert LaFollette as too impetuous. Wilson found it troubling that the likes of Bryan could compete for the White House with only "a good voice and a few ringing sentences,"³⁴ and he complained more generally about speakers who "disturb without instructing," who "exaggerate, distort, [and] distract."³⁵ For Wilson, the true spirit of eloquence rested not in a powerful voice or dramatic emotional appeals, but in broad liberal learning, an understanding of the "character, spirit, and thought of the nation," and knowledge of "the history and leading conceptions" of the nation's institutions.³⁶

As a candidate for president in 1912, Wilson transformed his scholarly views on rhetorical leadership and democratic debate into campaign issues, calling for a revival of public deliberation and political renewal "from below." There was something "astir in the air of America," he declared on the campaign trail, "an almost startling change in the temper of the people." In the past, campaigns had been occasions for "whooping it up." But now a new spirit had overtaken America, according to Wilson—a spirit of "frank discussion" and "common counsel." Citing the movement to open schoolhouse doors to town hall debates, Wilson concluded that Americans were longing to "get together" and "hear things of the deepest consequences discussed." He also reiterated his absolute faith in the ability of ordinary citizens to deliberate intelligently and govern themselves wisely:

I am not afraid of the American people getting up and doing something. . . You cannot make a reckless, passionate force out of a body of sober people earning their living in a free country. . . . I am not afraid of [their] judgments . . . because the deepest conviction and passion of my heart is that the common people . . . are to be absolutely trusted.³⁷

Wilson generally remained true to these ideals throughout his first term in office. Promoting his New Freedom legislation, he led public opinion in "a careful and constructive manner," occasionally taking his case to the people, but rarely resorting to the sort of dramatic, personal appeals that defined Roosevelt's "bully pulpit."³⁸ During his second term, however, Wilson seemed to change his attitude toward public opinion. Seeking a consensus to go to war, he authorized the most massive propaganda campaign in U.S. history: the Committee on Public Information's (CPI) effort to build public support for the war. Headed by journalist George Creel, the CPI distributed some seventy-five million pamphlets, plastered stirring pro-war posters on walls across the nation, and mobilized 75,000 "Four Minute Men" to deliver speeches to tens of millions of Americans—all singing the praises of "Americanism" and discrediting all things German.³⁹ Manipulating news coverage and stifling dissent, the CPI encouraged not public deliberation, but "hysteria, hatred, [and] an atmosphere of intolerance."⁴⁰ The CPI, in short, embodied a very different attitude toward public opinion: instead of a body of collective wisdom to be "absolutely trusted," public opinion was now something to be manipulated or manufactured.

After the war, Wilson's own speeches seemed to reflect this new attitude toward public opinion. Early in his League of Nations tour, he for the most part engaged his audiences in "common counsel," emphasizing the "great principles" underlying the peace treaty and making the case for the League in positive and substantive terms. As the tour progressed, however, he increasingly embraced the "modern" style advocated by his advisers: a more emotional, even demagogic style emphasizing the horrors of war and questioning the integrity and even the patriotism of his critics. Instead of celebrating democratic deliberation and the collective wisdom of the people, Wilson now tried to silence dissent and close off debate by suggesting that all who disagreed with his view had been corrupted by "pro-German propaganda." This drift toward demagoguery—this abandonment of Wilson's own neo-classical rhetorical principles—culminated in the most famous speech of the Western tour: his final speech in Pueblo, Colorado on September 25, 1919.

The Western Tour

Dressed in a blue coat, white trousers, white shoes, and a straw hat, Woodrow Wilson began his Western tour on September 3, 1919, departing from Union Station in Washington, D.C. Traveling with the president onboard his special railroad car, the *Mayflower*, was Mrs. Wilson, his physician Cary T. Grayson, Charles L. Swem, his personal stenographer, and, of course, Joseph Tumulty, his personal secretary and closest adviser. Also onboard the train were more than twenty reporters and wire service correspondents, along with motion picture photographers and a small contingent of secret service men. In planning the tour, Tumulty left nothing to chance. Detailed itineraries, called "maneuver sheets," were prepared for each stop, outlining the president's activities, accommodations, intra-urban transportation, and meetings with local dignitaries.

At his first stop, in Columbus, Ohio, the crowds in the streets proved disappointing, but his speech to a packed Memorial Hall was a "great hit with the crowd," Grayson recorded in his diary, as the president "lost no time in getting right after the opponents of the Treaty."⁴¹ Later that same day, Wilson addressed a crowd estimated at between 16,000 and 20,000 people at the State Fairgrounds in Indianapolis, making headlines by challenging his critics to "Put Up or Shut Up!" The next day in St. Louis he responded to news out of Washington that the Senate Foreign Relations Committee had voted to recommend four reservations to the treaty. Declaring the age of isolationism "gone and all but forgotten," Wilson accused his critics of betraying those who had fought in the war and labeled them "contemptible quitters."⁴² The next day in Des Moines, he delivered a more magnanimous and philosophical speech, emphasizing the virtues of a League of Nations. Not surprisingly, however, newspaper coverage of this first leg of the tour emphasized his attacks on his critics in the Senate. According to Robert T. Small, a reporter for the *Atlanta Constitution*, the president's "pent-up bitterness" had already "burst forth," and there was "no telling" what he might say about the opposition before his tour was over.⁴³

After a day of rest on Sunday, September 7, Wilson began the second week of his tour with a parade and speech in Omaha, Nebraska. Reporters covering the tour found the street crowds in Omaha "depressingly small,"⁴⁴ but when the president arrived at the auditorium for his speech he found it "crowded to the roof" with some 7,500 cheering supporters, many of whom had "gone without beds" for the night in order to see him.⁴⁵ Then it was on to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, where another capacity crowd of some 7,000 people turned out despite rainy weather. In Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, another "great crowd" greeted the president's train, and after addressing the Minnesota State Legislature he again spoke to large, enthusiastic crowds at both the Minneapolis Armory and the St. Paul Auditorium.⁴⁶ The next day in Bismarck, Wilson's "first audience of farmers" filled the 1,500-seat city auditorium;⁴⁷ in Billings on September 11, nearly 9,000 people (including a "large number of Indians") greeted the president; and in Helena later that same day another big crowd proved "extremely friendly to the President."⁴⁸ Only in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho did the crowd disappoint, as fewer than 2,000 turned out to hear Wilson speak in a circus tent that could have held many more. Later that same day, however, nearly 5,000 packed into the National Guard Armory in Spokane, and the next day his reception in Seattle/Tacoma was "so overwhelming and unrestrained as to recall Wilson's triumphal Italian tour."⁴⁹ Greeted by some 25,000 flag-waving citizens at the Tacoma stadium, Wilson spoke twice in that city before traveling to Seattle, where the spirit of the crowd was "akin to fanaticism," according to the *New York Times*.⁵⁰ Reviewing the Pacific fleet before addressing another standing-room-only crowd at the Seattle Arena, Wilson's reception on the West Coast convinced many observers that Wilson was indeed winning the debate.

That confidence only increased during the third week of the tour. Beginning in Portland, Wilson heeded the advice of friends that he "warm up a bit," pull out all the stops, and give his audiences some "sob stuff."⁵¹ He also began to respond more directly to his critics, not by answering their concerns but by questioning their motives and even their patriotism. In San Francisco, he accused his critics of encouraging "pro-German propaganda," and in a brief appearance in Berkeley he accused both his critics and "some of the newspapers" of "misleading the opinion of the United States."⁵² The next day in San Diego, before an enormous crowd of between 40,000 and 50,000 people, Wilson again complained that the people had been misled and warned that rejecting the treaty would mean a "death warrant" for the nation's children.⁵³ Concluding his third week on the road with a "monster mass meeting" at the Shriners' Auditorium in Los Angeles, Wilson even suggested that the treaty's critics lacked sympathy for those who had died in the Great War: "Have these gentlemen no hearts? Do they forget the sons that are dead in France? Do they forget the great sacrifice this nation has made?"⁵⁴

As Wilson departed California, the newspapers declared the debate all but over. Wilson had "crystallized public opinion," the *Los Angeles Times* reported, and the "obstructionists" were in disarray and retreat.⁵⁵ His reception in California had been a clear repudiation of those who sought to amend or kill the treaty. As Charles Grasty reported in the *New York Times*, public sentiment for ratification was now "simply overwhelming."⁵⁶

As Wilson turned back east on the last leg of his tour, however, he did not sound at all confident of victory. In Salt Lake City, he delivered a speech "filled with defiance and highlighted by flashes of anger," warning that the "spectre of Bolshevism" hung over the debate and accusing even the mild reservationists of succumbing to "pro-German influences." It was, as Cooper has argued, the "worst outburst" of "inflammatory statements" during the entire tour.⁵⁷ Moreover, the first signs of "real trouble" with Wilson's health appeared in Salt Lake City, as the president "faltered in his speech" and did not seem to have his "usual command over words."⁵⁸ Even the loyal Joseph Tumulty recognized that Wilson had missed his mark in Salt Lake City, telling the president that "your 'punch' did not land last night. . . . you simply pushed the ball; there was no snap in your stroke." According to Tumulty, neither the press nor his audience "really caught the point" of why the president so stubbornly resisted reservations, nor did they grasp his explanation of why Article X—the controversial provision committing the United States to defend other League members against "external aggression"—was the "heart" of the treaty. Again Tumulty urged Wilson to emphasize the sacrifice of those who had died in the war and to portray ratification without reservations as a matter of national honor.⁵⁹

Wilson did just that in his last two speeches before arriving in Pueblo. In Cheyenne, Wyoming, he declared it time for a "showdown" and announced that, as president, he would regard Senate adoption of reservations as "a rejection of the treaty." He then tried to frighten the opposition with predictions that the next world war would make World War I seem like "child's play" and concluded: "The issue is final. We cannot avoid it. We have got to make it now, and once made, there can be no turning back."⁶⁰ In Denver, he spoke in even more petulant and defiant tones, announcing at the start of his speech that all the objections to the treaty had been "cleared away" and blaming continued resistance to ratification on "hyphenated" Americans whose loyalties remained with their native countries: "Hyphen is the knife that is being stuck into this document." Again declaring the debate over, he also repeated his threat to treat any qualification or reservation by the Senate as a rejection of the entire treaty.⁶¹

Buoyed by his raucous reception in Denver, Wilson set out for Pueblo at 11:00 a.m. on September 25. Although he was suffering from a "splitting headache" and was "practically at the limit of his physical powers,"⁶² he agreed to be driven around the state fairgrounds in Pueblo, where a big crowd waited to cheer him. He then proceeded to the brand new civic auditorium, where 3000 people awaited his formal address. By "common consent," it would be the "most moving" speech of the Western tour—a speech that historian Thomas Bailey would later call the "high point of the entire trip."⁶³ In many ways, however, it was also one of the most demagogic—a speech that not only betrayed Wilson's own principles of oratorical statesmanship, but also foreshadowed some of the worst tendencies of the modern rhetorical presidency.

The Pueblo Speech

It was a little after 3:00 p.m. on Thursday, September 25 when Wilson rose to speak in Pueblo, Colorado. "This will have to be a short speech," he told the reporters who had heard him speak some thirty times already. "Aren't you fellows getting pretty sick of this"?⁶⁴ Yet inspired by ten minutes of cheering, Wilson somehow found the strength to deliver a 6152-word address that summarized virtually every theme he had addressed on the tour. Perhaps the warmth of his reception energized the ailing president. Or perhaps he somehow sensed that this might be his last speech. Whatever his inspiration, Wilson delivered a passionate speech that, according to legend, left at least some in the audience in tears.

Wilson broke little new ground in his Pueblo speech. Summarizing the results of his tour, he began by claiming that he had gotten an "inspiring impression" of public opinion during his tour (1). Yet he also confessed to some "unpleasant impressions," as he found himself forced to respond to the "absolutely false impression" of the treaty created by the "organized propaganda" of its critics. Coming from "exactly the same sources" that had demonstrated their "disloyalty" before the war, Wilson again blamed "hyphenated" Americans. In perhaps the most famous line of the address, Wilson seemingly condemned all who boasted of their foreign ancestry: "And I want to say—and I can't say it too often—any man who carries a hyphen about with him carries a dagger that he is ready to plunge into the vitals of this republic whenever he gets the chance. If I can catch any man with a hyphen in this great contest, I will know that I have caught an enemy of the republic" (2).

Promising to "clear away the mists" and "check the falsehoods" (2), Wilson returned to his earlier emphasis on the great principles behind the document, reviewing how it affirmed the right of self-determination, provided a "great international charter for the rights of labor" (4), and mobilized the "moral forces of the world" against aggression and war (5). He also addressed two issues that had been emphasized by critics of the treaty: an alleged voting advantage that the British would derive from their colonies in the League, and a provision allowing Japan to retain its ill-gotten jurisdiction over the Shantung province in China. About half-way through the speech, Wilson finally came to what he now defined as the "heart of the whole matter": the controversy over Article X. All the other objections had been "blown away like bubbles," he declared, and the nation now had to make a choice: either "accept or reject" the treaty, including its promise to "respect and preserve the territorial integrity and existing political independence of every other member of the League as against external aggression" (9). In Pueblo, Wilson again suggested that the League of Nations would be worthless without this guarantee, and he again made clear that he was in no mood to compromise. Article X struck at the "taproot of war" (12), he insisted, and to qualify or reject it would undermine the whole League.

Wilson sounded exasperated as he once again responded to the treaty's critics. Reacting to fears that Article X might force the United States to take military action, he noted that the Council of the League could only "advise what steps, if any, are necessary to carry out" the article's guarantee of territorial integrity and independence for member nations. "I do not know any other meaning for the word 'advise' except 'advise,'" Wilson exclaimed. The Council merely "advised," and it could not even

"advise" without the affirmative vote of the United States. Conceding that this provision might "impair somewhat the vigor of the League," Wilson seemed puzzled over objections to the provision: "Why gentlemen should fear that the Congress of the United States would be advised to do something that it did not want to do, I frankly cannot imagine, because they cannot even be advised to do anything unless their own representative has participated in the advice" (11).

Like all of the ideas he championed at Paris, Wilson claimed that Article X embodied American ideals and public opinion. "I would have felt very lonely . . . if, sitting at the peace table in Paris, I had supposed that I was expounding my own ideas," Wilson explained. He had "proposed nothing whatever" that he did not know with certainty "embodied the moral judgment of the citizens of the United States." In effect, he had gone to Paris with "explicit instructions," just as he had earlier expressed the "thought of the people of the United States" in his Fourteen Points. Recalling that earlier statement, Wilson claimed that he had "every assurance" that the Fourteen Points expressed the "moral judgment of the United States and not my single judgment." After the fourteen points became the basis for peace, he "crossed the ocean under bond to my own people and to the other governments with which I was dealing." He and the other negotiators were merely "architects" building on "specifications" established beforehand (12). Noting that many other leading public figures had endorsed the basic idea behind a League of Nations, he quoted from an editorial by Theodore Roosevelt calling for collective security in October of 1914. "The one effective move for obtaining peace," TR had written, "is by an agreement among all the great powers in which each should pledge itself not only to abide by the decisions of a common tribunal, but to back its decisions by force" (13).

Then Wilson turned on his critics. Claiming that there was "not a leg for these gentlemen to stand on," he recalled how he had first presented a draft of the covenant to the Senate in March. Then he had met with the Foreign Relations Committee and carried back to Paris a number of their suggestions, "every one" of which was "adopted." Venting his frustration, Wilson exclaimed: "What more could I have done? What more could have been obtained" (14)? He then left little doubt about where he stood on reservations. Inasmuch as he already had responded to the Senate's concerns, we now had to do "one or other of two things—we have got to adopt it or reject it. There is no middle course." Equating reservations with entering the League "on a special-privilege basis," he pronounced the American people "too proud to ask to be exempted from responsibilities which the other members of the League will carry." We had to go into the League "upon equal terms" or "we do not go in at all." Finally, he described the "tragedy" that would result if "dangerous pride" led the Senate to reject the treaty. Should that happen, Wilson argued, the United States would need to stand "ready to take care of ourselves," which meant maintaining "great standing armies and an irresistible navy." It also meant having "the organization of a military nation," with a "general staff, with the kind of power that the General Staff of Germany had, to mobilize this great manhood of the nation when it pleases." Under such a regime, he warned, "all the energy of our young men" would be "drawn into the thought and preparation for war" (15).

Wilson began the long, emotional peroration of his Pueblo speech with a rhetorical question: "What of our pledges to the men that lie dead in Europe?" Then marshaling his entire repertoire of emotional proofs, he declared his "clients" to be "the children"—the "next generation"—and he pledged to redeem his promise that they would never have to go "upon a similar errand" (15). He also recalled how grieving mothers had "blessed" him despite losing their sons in the war. "Again and again," he said, "mothers who lost their sons in France" had come up to him, taken his hand, and with tears in their eyes had said: "God bless you, Mr. President!" Why, Wilson asked, "should they pray to God to bless me? I advised the Congress . . . to create the situation that led to the death of their sons. I ordered their sons overseas. I consented to their sons being put in the most difficult parts of the battle line, where death was certain, as in the impenetrable difficulties of the forest of Argonne." Why would such women bless the president? The answer, of course, was that these mothers understood better than anyone the larger purposes and meaning of the war. They believed that their boys died for a cause "that vastly transcends any of the immediate and palpable objects of the war." They believed, and "rightly" so, "their sons saved the liberty of the world." They believed that, "wrapped up with the liberty of the world," was the "continuous protection of that liberty by the concerted powers of all civilized people." And, above all, they believed that "this sacrifice was made in order that other sons should not be called upon for a similar gift—the gift of life, the gift of all that died" (16).

Thus, Wilson claimed, in effect, that who died in the war died for the League of Nations. And to reject the League now would not only diminish their sacrifice but tarnish their memory. If the treaty were rejected, Wilson asked, "would not something of the halo go away from the gun over the mantelpiece, or the sword? Would not the old uniform lose something of its significance?" Those men were "crusaders," and "their transcendent achievement" had made "all the world believe in America as it believes in no other nation . . . in the modern world." Picturing soldiers lined up by his side as he battled for the League of Nations, Wilson imagined even the dead rallying to his cause: "There seems to me to stand between us and the rejection or qualification of this treaty the serried ranks of those boys in khaki—not only those boys who came home, but those dear ghosts that still deploy upon the fields of France" (16).

Finally, Wilson took his audience to a "beautiful hillside near Paris"—the American cemetery at Suresnes, where he had spoken on Memorial Day. "Behind me on the slopes," he recalled, "was rank upon rank of living American soldiers. And, lying before me upon the levels of the plain, was rank upon rank of departed American soldiers." As he spoke, Wilson recalled, a "little group of French women" stood nearby, paying their respects to the American boys who they had adopted as their own. Becoming "mothers to these dear boys," the French women put flowers on the graves of American boys every day "because they had died to save France." Implying that his critics lacked both sympathy and understanding, Wilson declared: "I wish that some men in public life who are now opposing the settlement for which these men died could visit such a spot as that. I wish that the feeling which came to me could penetrate their hearts." If only they could "feel the moral obligation that rests upon us not to go back on those boys," they would "see the thing through" and "make good their redemption of

the world. For nothing less depends upon us, nothing less than the liberation and salvation of the world" (17).

Wilson conceded that the League of Nations provided no "absolute guarantee" against future wars. But sounding a theme he had emphasized throughout the tour, he insisted that some "insurance" against war was better than "no insurance at all" and sounded an ironic note: "Now that the mists of this great question have cleared away, I believe that men will see the truth, eye to eye and face to face." In Pueblo, of course, it was Wilson himself who fogged the whole debate in the mists of war sentimentality. And in closing, he awkwardly conjured up an especially foggy, dream-like image, wistfully imagining peaceful pastures and a world without war: "We have accepted [the] truth, and we are going to be led by it, and it is going to lead us, and, through us, the world, out into pastures of quietness and peace such as the world never dreamed of before" (18).

At the time, reporters traveling with the president sensed nothing special about the Pueblo address. Reporting for the *Chicago Tribune*, Philip Kinsley observed that the president's emotional appeals were "effective as everywhere," and he noted that Mrs. Wilson had "tears on her cheeks" as the president finished his address. Yet Kinsley led his dispatch that day with news of the steel strike in Pueblo, and he described Wilson's reception as "respectful and friendly" but "not particularly enthusiastic."⁶⁵ Similarly, the *Los Angeles Times* only briefly paraphrased Wilson's pledge to fight for the children, emphasizing instead his attack on hyphenated Americans and his call for a political "showdown."⁶⁶ Instead of noting Wilson's sentimental reflections on war, the newspapers emphasized his defiance, highlighting how in both of his speeches that day he had threatened to kill the treaty himself.⁶⁷ Several years later, a reporter traveling with the president, David Lawrence, would recall the Pueblo speech as a "masterpiece of eloquence."⁶⁸ At the time, however, nobody seemed to sense anything special about the speech. Nobody imagined that it would go down in history as one of the greatest speeches of Wilson's career.

What elevated the Pueblo speech to the status of a "great" presidential address? Why do we remember it as one of the "top 100 speeches" of the twentieth century? The answer lies not so much in the speech itself as in what happened afterwards. As told and retold over the years, the story of the Pueblo speech became one of the great political dramas of American history—a story of visionary leadership, personal courage, and heroic self-sacrifice. Moreover, historians have concluded that Wilson was right about the need for a League of Nations. By the 1960s, the revisionist portrait of Wilson had become firmly entrenched, redeeming not only the content of the Pueblo speech but also its passionate style. Today, we praise the Pueblo speech, not only because we have decided that Wilson was "right," but also because we now have a very different conception of presidential "eloquence."

The Legacy of the Pueblo Speech

Woodrow Wilson was very tired and "suffering" when he returned to his railroad car following his speech in Pueblo, according to Grayson. So twenty miles outside of

town, Grayson ordered the train stopped so the president could take a walk and get some fresh air.⁶⁹ That walk, along with what happened later that night, became the key events in a tragic narrative that continues to color our memories of the Pueblo speech. After returning from his walk, according to his wife Edith, the president was "much refreshed" and even "cheerful." Yet later that night, Mrs. Wilson summoned Grayson with news that Wilson was very sick and in "unbearable" pain.⁷⁰ Fearing that he might die, Grayson recommended that the rest of the trip be canceled. The treaty debate would go on, but the Western tour was over.

As the presidential train sped back toward Washington, news of Wilson's illness caused a "sensation."⁷¹ When the train finally arrived back in Washington on September 28, the president reportedly walked unaided to a waiting car, convincing some observers that he would be just fine after a few days rest. But then, on October 2, the president suffered a stroke and collapsed on the bathroom floor, where Edith found him "bloody and unconscious."⁷² For the remaining seventeen months of his presidency, Wilson remained a virtual invalid, with Mrs. Wilson jealously guarding his privacy and the fate of the treaty hanging in doubt.

During this time, the Senate twice voted to reject the Versailles treaty—first on November 19, then again on March 19 of the following year. As Wilson regained a measure of his health, he tried to fight back, proposing a wild scheme for turning the 1920 election into a "great and solemn referendum" on the treaty.⁷³ Yet, for many, these efforts only confirmed that he was a "petulant and sick man" and, in his opposition to reservations, had become "the principal obstacle to ratification."⁷⁴ Before long, even the most devoted treaty supporters gave up the fight, and Wilson's great crusade—indeed, his "great political career"—came to a "pitiful end."⁷⁵

The Western tour might have been remembered as a lesson in failed presidential leadership—an illustration of Wilson's own principle that public opinion "must not be outstripped" but "kept pace with."⁷⁶ Instead, it lives on in history and public memory as a tale of heroic personal sacrifice and lost opportunity. Had the nation only listened to Wilson, or so the story goes, World War II might have been avoided. The events surrounding the Pueblo speech are an important part of this story, at least as they have been dramatized and fictionalized over the years.

First came Joseph Tumulty's memoir, published just two years after the tour. Recalling the Pueblo speech as "one of the best and most passionate" of Wilson's career, Tumulty reveled in Wilson's portrait of that "beautiful hillside near Paris" and recalled how the speech left some in tears.⁷⁷ Then came Edith Wilson's memoir, published in 1938. Recalling the president's promise to make only a "short speech," Mrs. Wilson wrote of the surprising, even mysterious burst of energy and passion that seemed to overtake the ailing president. "Strangely," she wrote, the speech he delivered that day—a day in which he was suffering terribly from a headache—"was one of the longest, one of the most vigorous and touching he made on the tour." As he "warmed to his subject," Edith recalled, his "weariness seemed to leave him. New and undiscovered reservoirs of strength seemed to reinforce his efforts."⁷⁸

Both Tumulty and Mrs. Wilson portrayed Wilson as a heroic martyr, vigorously resisting the decision to call off the trip, even though his "whole left side was

paralyzed." "Don't you see that if you cancel this trip," Tumulty recalled Wilson saying, "Senator Lodge and his friends will say that I'm a quitter and that the Western trip was a failure, and the Treaty will be lost?" Tumulty concluded with a heroic portrait of this martyr to peace: "Suffering the greatest pain, paralyzed on his left side, he was still fighting desperately for the thing that was so close to his heart—a vindication of the things for which he had so gallantly fought on the other side. Grim old warrior that he was, he was ready to fight to the death for the League of Nations."⁷⁹ Edith too recalled Wilson protesting the decision to cancel the tour, although in somewhat different words: "No, no, no. I must keep going." According to Edith, however, Wilson finally "accepted the decree of Fate as gallantly as he had fought the fight," never once voicing a "syllable of self-pity or regret" over the decision to cancel the tour.⁸⁰

Over the years, the legend of Pueblo has been embellished by popular historians and even Hollywood filmmakers. In 1944, for example, Oscar-winning producer Darryl F. Zanuck released a lavish 20th Century Fox production, *Wilson*, that told an even more dramatic version of the story of Pueblo. In a liberal exercise of dramatic license, Zanuck had Wilson delivering his Pueblo address from the rear platform of his train car (not in Pueblo's new civic auditorium), and he depicted Wilson being struck down during the speech by some sort of seizure. In Zanuck's rendition, Wilson did not speak the words he actually spoke in Pueblo, but rather delivered a dark, fatalistic speech in which he apologized to soldiers who had fought in the Great War: "You are betrayed! You fought for something that you did not get!" In a variation upon words that Wilson actually delivered three weeks earlier in St. Louis, Zanuck also had Wilson warning of a time when, "in the vengeful providence of God," another world war would claim the lives not of a "few hundred thousand fine young men from American" but "as many millions" as would be necessary to secure "the final freedom of the peoples of the world." Yet then, after speaking less than three minutes, Wilson was visibly jolted and had to be helped back into the train. To this day, at least one on-line educational site still has Wilson collapsing during his Pueblo speech, either from a "mild stroke" or some sort of "nervous breakdown."⁸¹

The revisionist portrait of Wilson as a prophetic and courageous crusader for world peace received official, bipartisan sanction in 1956, when the U.S. Congress created the Woodrow Wilson Centennial Celebration Commission. Charged with developing "suitable plans" for celebrating the 100th anniversary of Wilson's birth, the Commission sponsored educational programs, commemorative services, and scholarly publications, all designed to put Wilson "high on the list of great American Presidents." Scarcely a generation before, the Commission conceded, Wilson had been a "highly controversial" figure, a president at the "center of the bitterest political battles," and a man who suffered a "calamitous defeat" in the League of Nations debate. Yet "momentous events," including a "second and more devastating world war," had dictated a reassessment of Wilson. Now we had come to appreciate Wilson's "mastery of lucid prose," his "deep humanitarian instincts," and his "realistic vision of instrumentalities to promote world peace." By "nationwide accord," the Commission concluded, Wilson was now "recognized as one of America's greatest presidents."⁸²

Since the 1950s, the revisionist portrait of Wilson has been reinforced in both popular and scholarly histories. In 1964, for example, Gene Smith, a journalist with a "strong sense of history's drama," crafted a version of the Western tour "straight out of Greek tragedy."⁸³ In reconstructing the Pueblo speech, Smith wrote of the look of "terror" on the First Lady's face with the president stumbled over some words early in the speech. But the president somehow "gathered himself together," recalling his speech in France on Memorial Day and wishing that the senators opposing the League "might have been there on that day." According to Smith, "men and women alike" reached for handkerchiefs to "wipe their eyes"—a slight embellishment on other accounts of the speech. Then, after speaking of the "dear ghosts who still deploy upon the fields of France," Wilson again lost focus. "He halted," Smith wrote. "The people looked at him and he at them." Smith then invented a dramatic scene that not even Hollywood had imagined: "The President of the United States, standing before an audience of some several thousand of his fellow citizens, was crying. . . . He turned away and the First Lady came to him. Their tears mixed." According to Smith, Wilson also "burst into tears" when later told that the trip had to be cancelled.⁸⁴

Few historians engage in such complete fabrication, of course, and not all historians have praised the Pueblo speech as a masterpiece of Wilsonian eloquence. Historians Robert H. Ferrell criticized the concluding lines of the speech as "tired words, not Wilsonian,"⁸⁵ while biographer Kendrick A. Clements has called Wilson's language "tired and ordinary" and the speech as a whole "not very good."⁸⁶ Yet most historians seem to agree with Thomas Bailey's assessment that the Pueblo speech was the "high point of the entire trip,"⁸⁷ and even the most careful historian of the League debate, John Milton Cooper, Jr., considers it among the "best performances" of the tour.⁸⁸ Aside from sympathy for Wilson's physical suffering after the speech, what might account for such praise? Why have historians for the most part celebrated the Pueblo speech?

Part of the answer lies in our changing conceptions of presidential eloquence. Since Wilson's day, the presidency has become even more of a speech-making office, and we have come to expect presidents to "go public" to promote themselves and their policies. Having lost touch with the neo-classical tradition, we find it neither surprising nor inappropriate for a president to deliver a passionate, campaign-style speech in support of a policy initiative. Indeed, we expect presidents to speak in emotional and highly partisan terms, engaging in a "permanent campaign" to promote their policy agenda.⁸⁹ For Jeffrey Tulis, that is the hallmark of the modern "rhetorical presidency," and the explanation for Wilson's failure in the League debate rests in the fact that people in his day took the president's popular speech far too seriously. Today, according to Tulis at least, we recognize that presidents don't really mean what they say in public. And in Tulis's view, that is a good thing, for a president cannot possibly be "candid and forthright in popular speech" and still deliberate seriously with Congress.⁹⁰

Some also celebrate Wilson's Pueblo speech because they believe, along with historian Arthur S. Link, that he was "right in his larger vision."⁹¹ After World War II, Link has argued, we finally learned the lesson that Wilson tried to teach in 1919: that the "most immoral thing" a nation could do was to "refuse to exercise power responsibly when it possesses it." For two decades, America ignored that principle, retreating back

into what Link has characterized as an outmoded isolationism and spurning "the responsibility that accompanied its power."⁹² More recently, Cooper has echoed Link's views, proclaiming Wilson "absolutely right" in his larger vision, even if he "failed to be as flexible and persuasive" as he might have been. "For all their decency and intelligence," Cooper has concluded, "Wilson's opponents were wrong. For all his flaws and missteps, Wilson was right. He should have won the League fight. His defeat did break the heart of the world."⁹³

Perhaps if Wilson had "won" the League of Nations debate, there would have been no Hitler, no Holocaust, no World War II. In a sense, however, he did win the debate, as his "new vision" of American internationalism has been embraced by "almost every American president since Franklin Roosevelt."⁹⁴ Today, we assume that the United States has a right, even a moral obligation, to "mind other peoples' business," as Wilson himself put it in Indianapolis. As a result, we find ourselves constantly embroiled in international conflicts around the world. In an age of widespread resentment toward American foreign policy, perhaps the time has come to reconsider the ethical and practical utility of Wilsonian internationalism. Perhaps the time has come for another "great debate" over American foreign policy.

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5 See Stephen E. Lucas and Martin J. Medhurst, *Words of a Century: The Top 100 American Speeches, 1900-1999* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

6 Kraig, "The Second Oratorical Renaissance," 15.

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